

Senate Natural Resources Committee Members:

I apologize that we could not attend your committee today. Please consider these comments in support of Senate Bill 163. we wanted to voice our support for the Bill on behalf of our family, our business, our 200 full time and seasonal workers, and many in the blueberry industry.

We have been working for over a year now in partnership with the farm bureau and the blueberry industry to educate and effectively communicate the benefits that the blueberry industry brings to both Michigan's economy and the simultaneous preservation and management of our State's precious wetlands. Long before the clean water act was penned, or before the prestigious wetlands preservation advocacy groups were founded, blueberry farmers were preserving and managing wetlands resources in Michigan, and continue to this day. We are very supportive of the general permit proposed in the bill. We do not know the language that will be drafted for the permit however we are and will be actively engaged with the DEQ, MDARD, and the farm bureau on the language.

I want to ensure this committee that some very prudent best management practices, some of which are already in the bill, the rest of which I am sure will be in the general permit; will be adhered to. We will protect, manage, and ensure that the land we are stewards of remains wetlands.

I want to credit the willingness of Director Wyant and his department along with Director Jamie Clover Adams and her department for considering our industry's unique circumstances as it relates to wetlands preservation. Unlike other stakeholders that have opinions about the blueberry language being presented in the bill, Director Wyant and Director Adams have both ensured that all levels of their departments, from field staff up to and including themselves have done a factual analysis of our best management practices, visited our farms, explained the limitations of our exemptions, and we have all come to agreements on how blueberry farming can continue to fulfill the goals previously mentioned. I would like to ask this committee to place more weight on the conviction of their respective departments than opinions of other stakeholders that have not taken any time to evaluate our industry.

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